

Traditional Irish-stew

Ingredients:

2 tbsp. vegetable oil
1 lb. / 450 g. mutton or lamb cutlets (bone removed, cut into 2-inch/5-centimeter chunks)
2 tbsp. plain flour
2 lb. / 1 kg. Potatoes (peeled and cut into quarters)
1 cup/115 g. onion (roughly chopped)
1 cup/ 100 g. leeks (cleaned and finely sliced)
1 cup/170 g. carrots (roughly chopped)
1 1/2 pints / 750 ml. dark beef stock
2 or 3 cabbage leaves (thinly sliced)
Salt (to taste)
Pepper (to taste)



Method:

- Heat the oven to 350 F/ 180 C/ Gas 4
- In a large frying pan heat half the oil to hot but not smoking. Add half the lamb and brown all over by turning in the hot oil.
- Remove the lamb with tongs and place in a casserole.
- Cover with a half of the quartered potatoes, onions, leeks, and carrots.
- Add the remaining oil to the frying pan, heat again then add the remaining lamb and brown all over as before and add to the casserole.
- Cover with the remaining vegetables.
- Add the flour to the frying pan and stir really well to soak up any fat and juices. Cook on a gentle heat for 3 minutes.
- Then add stock a ladle at a time until you have a thick, lump-free sauce.
- Pour this sauce over the lamb and vegetables.
- Add the remaining stock to the casserole, cover with a tightfitting lid, and cook in the oven for 1 hour.
- Add the cabbage (if using) replace the lid and cook for another hour. Check from time to time to make sure the stock isn't reducing too much, if it is add a little boiling water. The meat and vegetables should always be covered by liquid. If the sauce is too runny at the end, you can always cook a little longer with the lid removed. Season with salt and pepper.
- Serve piping hot and as it already has plenty of potatoes and vegetables it is unlikely it will need more. Perhaps a little crusty bread would be good though to soak up all that fabulous gravy.
- Like all stews and casseroles, they benefit from being made the day before, this is no exception.

History:

Irish stew is a celebrated Irish dish, yet its composition is a matter of dispute. Purists maintain that the only acceptable and traditional ingredients are neck mutton chops or kid, potatoes, onions, and water. Generally, the meat used was on the bone, from the neck or shank, as this was thought to add more flavour. Others would add such items as carrots, turnips and pearl barley; but the purists maintain that they spoil the true flavour of the dish. It is generally accepted that it was only the few luckier families that may have been able to use goat or lamb, and add more root vegetables, like carrots, turnips or parsnips. The ingredients are boiled and simmered slowly for up to two hours. Mutton was the dominant ingredient because the economic importance of sheep lay in their wool and milk produce and this ensured that only old or economically non-viable animals ended up in the cooking pot, where they needed hours of slow cooking. Irish stew is the product of a culinary tradition that relied almost exclusively on cooking over an open fire. It seems that Irish stew was recognised as early as about 1800

A 1800s ballad celebrated the homey satisfaction of a hot bowl: "Then hurrah for an Irish stew / That will stick to your belly like glue."